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ABSTRACT

Noting the recent growing concern for the theoretical development of intercultural communication, this paper reviews various interpretive schools of thought that have used qualitative research methods in either intracultural or intercultural communication contexts. Following a brief discussion of the differences between qualitative and quantitative research, the first section of the paper delineates the underlying logic and aims of qualitative research in intercultural communication settings, while the second section reviews the interpretive schools that hold promise for intercultural qualitative inquiry. The third section discusses critical methodological issues of validity and reliability. The final section suggests further directions for qualitative research in cross-cultural and intercultural communication contexts.
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QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION:

AN OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this essay is to review various interpretive schools of thought that have utilized qualitative research methods in either in'racultural or intercultural communication contexts. Specifically, the paper will be developed in four sections: (1) the underlying logic and aims of qualitative research in intercultural communication settings will be delineated; (2) the interpretive schools that hold promise for intercultural qualitative inquiry will be reviewed; (3) critical methodological issues such as the research cast, the research setting, and the twin issues of validity and reliability will be discussed; and (4) future directions for qualitative research in cross-cultural and intercultural communication contexts will be suggested.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION:

AN OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In recent years there has been an increasing concern regarding the theoretical development of intercultural communication.[1] However, little effort has been devoted to a critical assessment of the issues that undergird intercultural communication methods. It seems imperative that with the growing interests of communication scholars conducting intercultural communication research, a sound set of methodological criteria should be systematically developed, so that intercultural communication studies can be objectively appraised and evaluated.

The intent of this paper is to review and examine the underlying assumptions and methodological choices under intercultural qualitative inquiry. The basic tenet of the essay argues that the primary distinction between qualitative research and quantitative research stems not from methodological differences, but from the fundamental principles that govern and guide each research paradigm. While proponents for or against qualitative research have engaged in heated debates on the pros and cons of qualitative research techniques, relatively little has been said concerning the linkages between theory and method. It is the stance of this author that one cannot discuss research methods without some reference to theory; and vice versa, one cannot engage in an intellectual debate of theory, without some reference to research methods.

This essay will be developed in four sections. First, the logic and aims of qualitative inquiry in intercultural communication research will be addressed. Second, some examples of the interpretive schools of thought in conjunction with different qualitative methods will be reviewed. Third, critical methodological issues that pertain to qualitative research will be discussed. Finally, directions for qualitative research in intercultural communication will be recommended.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: LOGIC AND AIMS

Qualitative research is a mode of investigation that shares the meta-theoretical assumptions of the interpretive paradigm. The term "paradigm" denotes a conceptual framework that includes a set of core philosophical assumptions , values, and beliefs toward the conceptualization of social reality. The "interpretive paradigm" is based upon the assumption that social reality is created and sustained through the subjective and inter-subjective experience of the actors in the scene.[2] The social actors are viewed as active interpreters of their own symbolic activities such as language games, verbal rituals, metaphors, and social dramas. The basic task of qualitative studies, is the study of these interpretations.

This line of thought concerning an interpretive science of research can be traced back to the writings of the eighteenth-century Neapolitan philosopher, Giambattista Vico.[3] According to Vico, the primary function of interpretive social science should focus on an understanding and an explanation of how human beings actively create what is distinctively human--civilizations and cultures. The word "science" should be taken as a painstaking process of accumulating a systematic body of knowledge concerning distinctive human symbolic achievements. Vico's works have been continued through the writings of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and interpretive sociology in the twientieth-century.[4]

In comparison, the "functional paradigm" which guides quantitative mode of inquiry, is based on the core assumption that social reality has an objective, external ontological structure composed of a network of determinate relationships between constituent parts.[5] Individuals are viewed as "responding agents" or "adaptive agents" in this objectively-structured social environment. The basic task of quantitative studies, is the study of a set of hypothesized relationships

concerning human behavior in a generalizable, predictable social world.

Extending the fundamental beliefs of the interpretive paradigm, three observations that are applicable to qualitative inquiry can be deduced. First, qualitative research is the study of symbolic discourse that constitutes the multiple realities for the involved actors in the scene. Discourse here, refers to both the study of "texts" (monolog forms such as narratives and speeches) and "conversations" (dialog forms in face-to-face or mediated interactions). Second, qualitative research is the study of the interpretive principles that social actors used to cognitively "make sense" of the meanings that are attached to their symbolic activities. Interpretive principles here, denote two processes. The first process is concerned with the processing and comprehension of the discourse from the participants' viewpoint. The second process is concerned with the strategic choices of the participants in selecting the symbolic codes for presentation, given the prior discourse context. Third, qualitative research is the study of the contextual principles that situationally govern and guide the interpretation of discourse in a speech community. Contextual principles may include the roles and relationships of the participants, the presence of the onlookers, the physical setting, to a set of relevant situational events within which the discourse is functioning.

In short, the task of the interpretive social theorist is to "interpret these interpretations so that we may better understand the meanings people

used to guide their activities."[6] Qualitative mode of inquiry, which includes different qualitative research techniques such as participant-observation, naturalistic field study, life history analysis, textual analysis, and metaphor analysis, is primarily interested in eliciting the "insider's meanings" of a social situation from the stance of a participant-observer.

In contrast, the implications of the functional paradigm to quantitative mode of inquiry are as follows. First, because of the law-like mechanistic structure of social reality, social phenomenon can be explained through causal and functional models in essentially objective, statistical terms. Second, since individuals are viewed as passive reactors or adaptors of information in a hard, concrete environment, human behavior can be studied through controlled observations, lab experiments, mass surveys, and other forms of research manipulations. Third, communication process is concrete and tangible, and can be studied and analyzed by a detached, outside observer without the necessity of touching base with the social actors involved in the setting. Quatiiative mode of inquiry is , in essence, an "outsider's mode of inquiry," while qualitative mode of inquiry is an "insider's mode of inquiry." The task of the functionalist is primarily interested in verifying and establishing "objective truths" based on a priori criteria

of selected variables and hypotheses in what is usually a context-free environment.

In brief the primary difference between qualitative research and quantitative research is not simply based on the distinction between "qualifying" and "quantifying" of data. Rather, the difference is rooted in the ontological or metaphorical orientations that guide each research endeavor. The "language game" metaphor in the interpretive framework suggests that "realities emerge as rule-governed symbolic structures as individuals engage in their worlds through the use of specific codes and practices, in order to vest their situations with meaningful form."[7] Language is not merely descriptive; it is ontological. Whereas in the functional paradigm, the metaphors of the "machine" and the "organ" dominate this framework.[8] The mechanical imagery denotes the rational performance of work in specified means-ends relationship. Schools of thought such as behaviorism, social exchange, and cost-reward model, belong to this camp. The organismic imagery denotes the survival performance based on differentiation and integration of mutually interdependent parts of a given whole. Schools of thought such as general systems approach, structural functionalist theory, and contingency theory, are reflective of this root metaphor.

In uncovering the underlying aims of qualitative research in intercultural communication, the following three objectives of intercultural qualitative studies are proposed. The first objective of intercultural qualitative inquiry is to discover the meanings and significance the social actors have for the different forms (for example, speech acts, rituals, myths, and social dramas) of symbolic discourse that infused that particular cultural community. The second objective of intercultural inquiry is to explain how social actors in that particular speech community use both interpretive principles and contextual

principles to "make sense" of their consensually-shared meanings. Finally, the ultimate objective of intercultural qualitative research is to understand the differences and similarities of how different actors in different speech communities , using culturally-grounded interpretive and contextual principles, arrive at an "interpretive understanding" of one another's meanings.

Culture, in this essay, is defined as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward symbolic life."[9] Hence, while symbolic activities reflect the "deep structures" of meanings of a particular cultural system, culture itself,also serves as the larger interpretive context in which the interpretive principles and the contextual principles of the natives' are located. Culture provides the normative context in which symbolic behavior is judged as proper or improper to the social situation. Based on these expectational principles of a culture, both the interpretive meanings and the contextual meanings of the social actors are anchored and integrated. As Clifford Geertz, in his seminal work The Interpretation of Culture, commented:

> This, then, is the second face of our argument: Undirected by culture patterns--organized systems of significant symbols --man's behavior would be virtually ungovernable, a mere chaos of pointless acts and exploding emotions, his experience virtually shapeless. Culture, the accumulated totality of such patterns, is not just an ornament of human existence but--the principal basis of its specificity--an essential condition for it.[10]

Human beings live by making interpretations. These interpretations are grounded in the cultural reality of the social actors. Culture provides the screening device or a set of normative criteria to judge the appropriate or inappropriate

performance of the social actors in situ. The "sense making" principles, in turn, are embedded in the social schemata and the cultural schemata of a particular speech community system. In sum, the primary mission of an interpretive approach to culture is the explanation and the understanding of how social actors negotiate and interpret their symbolic activities, and how such symbolic activities are a depiction (or are in paradox) of their social and cultural lives--which consitute distinctive human achievements.

INTERCULTURAL QUALITATIVE APPROACHES: AN OVERVIEW

Based on the foregoing discussions on the relationship between the interpretive paradigm and qualitative mode of inquiry, this section will turn to an overview of three schools of interpretive thought that bear relevance to intercultural communication research. These three interpretive schools of thought are: social action school, ethnomethodology school, and constructivist school.

Social Action School

The few intercultural studies that have followed the qualitative path of inquiry can be found mainly under the social action orientation of research. In essence, the social action theorists view reality as a symbolic manifestation process in which individuals assign specific meanings to socially-coordinated symbolic activities and events. The key question that confronts this school of thought is: how do individuals assign particular interpretations of particular symbolic acts? Two levels of analysis have emerged out of this orientation: the rule-structure approach and the meaning-structure approach. The cultural works of Pearce and Cronen, Stanback and Pearce embrace the first approach; and the cultural concepts of Katriel and Philipsen, Koch and Deetz embrace the second camp.[11]

For example, working from a coordinated-management of meaning (CMM) framework, Stanback and Pearce seek to explore the relationship between communication rules and social stratification process in the American culture. Based on the premise that all social realities impose performance demands on their social actors, they discovered through existing ethnographic texts that different forms of "black talk" function differently in different social stratification settings. Specifically from a cultural analysis perspective, they found that tomming and dissembling are consistent with an other-culture perspective, while shucking and passing are consistent with a co-culture or "third-culture" perspective.[12] The goal of this line of research is to describe and discover how individuals' rule structures interlock on different hierarchical levels in order to "make sense" of the social worlds around them.

Under the meaning-structure approach, these cultural communication theorists view reality as manisfested through the different "ways of speaking."[13] The "way of speaking" itself is viewed as a cultural code embedded in the creative processes of human symbolic discourse. Katriel and Philipsen, in analyzing in-depth case studies and cultural texts, found that the taxonomies of "communication," "self," and "relationship" significantly co-occur in the field of American discourse. "Communication" is perceived by most American people as the thread that strings through the two alienated terms: "self" and "relationship." In the context of American culture, "communication" is a distinctive cultural solution in which individualism and community are fused together into one term. The two goals of this line of inquiry are: (1) to understand how individuals create, constitute, and assign meanings to this cultural discourse process, and (2) to understand how particular speech patterns reflect the underlying "logical forces" of a particular culture. Symbolic texts, events, and rituals are viewed as cultural artifacts that reflect the deep meanings of a cultural system.

Closely align to this cultural communication perspective, is Deetz's work on the metaphor analysis of cultural discourse. According to Deetz, metaphor analysis in interpretive research is concerned with making clear the "deep systems of meanings manifested in everyday talk and to describe the conditions under which specific cultural experiences are possible."[14] For example, in viewing the term "relationship" as metaphorically structured, he found that there are considerable differences between how Malaysian students describe the term "relationship" and how American students describe the word "relationship." Typically, the Malaysian students would use more sensual and concrete metaphors such as "perfectly round fruit," or "flesh under your nails" to describe the label "relationship." American students would tend to use more action-oriented metaphors such as "relationship breakdown," "relationship falling apart," or "people 'work' on their relationship" to describe this particular term. The ultimate goal of this line of research is to reach an understanding of how individuals achieve metaphorical alignment through symbolic discourse in different cultural systems.

A close examination of the rule-structure approach and the meaning-structure approach uncovers four common characteristics between these two approaches. First, both are interested in the interpretations of the "sense making" principles of the social actors. Second, both approaches believe in the systematicity of rule-structures and meaning-structures the actors used in relationship to an understanding of culture. Third, they both ascribe to the importance of the situatedness of human symbolic discourse. Finally, they engage in similar qualitative research processes of deconstruction and reconstruction of rules and meanings (through rule

analysis, textual analysis, or metaphor analysis) of symbolic events in order to understand the basic conditions of human behavior and culture.

In sum, both rule-structure and meaning-structure approaches can provide infinite possibilities for tapping at the "expectational principles," the "interpretive principles," and the "contextual principles" of a given culture. The Cultural Communication Perspective (CCP) presents a superordinate goal in understanding the normative relationship between communication and culture.[15] Through textual analysis of rituals, myths, and social dramas of a speech community, culture can be understood via the performance of these cultural communication forms. In analyzing the use of cultural metaphors from the social actors' perspective, the fundamental "interpretive principles" that guide the symbolic activities of the social actors can be naturalistically elicited. In viewing communication process as a creatively-coordinated process, the CMM views symbolic discourse as operating at a variety of contextual levels. The units of contextual analysis include: context, speech acts, episodes, relationship, life-scripting, and cultural pattern.[16] The model is an elegant way of accounting for the use of "contextual principles" on both the micro-level and the macro-level of analysis of contextual meanings.

Intercultural interpretive understanding has been achieved, when conversants from two distinct cultures, converge on their interpretations of symbolic meanings on all three "sense making" levels (normative, interpretive, and contextual). Intercultural misunderstanding arises, when two interactants from two distinct cultures misalign the use of normative rules, interpretive rules, and/or contextual rules in a given social discourse situation. Hence, an understanding of rule-structures and meaning-structures to discourse is one of the fundamental task of qualitative mode of inquiry.

Ethnomethodology School

Under the rubric of interpretive paradigm, another school of thought that holds promises for intercultural qualitative research is that of the ethnomethodological approach. In a thorough review article of ethnomethods, Beach suggested that there are three lines of inquiry that have emerged from this interpretive school: formal ethnomethodology, conversational analysis, and cognitive sociology.[17]

The basic premise of this interpretive school assumes that reality is a subjective construction capable of disappearing once the symbolic discourse between the interactants ceases. The primary unit of analysis focuses on the implicit, cognitive "taken-for-granted" structures of the social actors in relationship to the conversational discourse process. Participant-observations and sympathetic introspection are the methodological preferences.

The formal ethnomethodologist would be concerned with "viewing interactants themselves as methodologists common-sensically create a sense of social reality, these scholars study the relationship between practical reasoning and social structure in specific communication contexts."[18] Specifically, in the context of intercultural communication research, the ethnomethodologist would be interested in questions like: What constitutes "practical reasoning" in a particular cultural system? How do "natives" in different cultures "common-sensically" re-construct and interpret a given symbolic situation? How do two intercultural communicators converge on their use of "accounting" processes if they operate on different cultural logical assumptions (for example, linear logic versus spiral logic in the low context and the high context cultural systems)? and, what kinds of necessary and sufficient background knowledge are needed in order for intercultural communicators to effectively "make sense" of one another's

meanings? The use of direct and indirect speech acts, politeness rituals, account processes (excuses and justifications, remedial and legislative talks,etc.) have served as data base for this approach.[19] The works of Harold Garfinkel represent this stance.[20]

According to Beach, the conversational analysist in turn, would be interested in "an understanding of the sequential mechanisms of speech exchange i.e. the ways in which ordinary conversations are workably built and turn-organized according to procedural rules."[21] In the context of intercultural qualitative inquiry, a conversational analysist would be interested in questions like: how do intercultural interactants "get things done" conversationally? How do international negotiators derive a sense of conversation understanding and satisfaction when their turn-taking mechanisms are deterred because of the translation process? Specifically, how do simultaneous translation and consecutive translation affect the intercultural discourse process? Works such as Jefferson, Sacks, and Schegloff exemplify the conversational analysis approach.[22]

Finally, the cognitive sociologist is interested in the study of the linkage between "discourse patterning and cultural belief systems."[23] This approach is primarily interested in how cultural expectations and beliefs affect the use of speech patterns in a particular social discourse system. What are the shared patterns of expectations and meanings individuals have on the discourse process? and what are the underlying social and cultural variables that influence the cognitive interpretation of the discourse process? The works of Aaron Cicourel represent this mode of investigation.[24]

In brief, the major characteristics of the ethnomethodology school of interpretation are: First, discourse process or discourse pattern is the central concern of this school. Second, the use of "common sense" structures to create a subjective shared social reality between the

conversants implies the use of both "expectational principles" ("common sense" knowledge) and "interpretive principles" to an understanding of the discourse process. Finally, while the social action school of interpretation holds a heavier emphasis on the relationship between normative rules and contextual rules to discourse, the ethnomethodology school places a higher emphasis on the relationship between normative rules and interpretive rules to the "discoursing" process. Although there is a growing interest in discourse analysis in the communication discipline, most of the studies are intraculturally-based. There has been a dearth of studies in intercultural discourse process, especially stemming from the qualitative mode of inquiry. Most language studies that are related to intercultural communication are from social psychologists' works on intergroup communication, and works from linguists concerning bilingualism, code-switching, and language planning.[25] Hence, the discussion in this section is primarily aimed at clarifying the underlying logics of the three ethnomethodological approaches and their potential implications to the study of intercultural discourse, rather than a review of intercultural works in this area.

Constructivist School

The construcivist school of interpretation that has been developed by Jesse Delia and his associates is interested in the study of the developmental processes of cognitive systems that underlie the emergent quality of communication in different contexts.[26] According to Applegate and Sypher, the four basic characteristics that appropriately reflect this school are : (1) it focuses on the forms and functions of communication in relationship to everyday social interaction; (2) social actors are viewed as active interpreters of their own social environment; (3) it is vital to capture the cultural participants' first-

order construction of reality; and (4) the focus of theory development is on the relationship between communication and culture, rather than on intercultural, cross-cultural, or interracial communication.[27]

The four primary units of analysis for this school are: interpretation, action, interaction, and communication. All four concepts are said to be culturally-embedded. The purpose of a cultural constructivist viewpoint on communication is to study the "reciprocal intentions" of the cultural participants and to understand how the cultural natives coordinate their symbolic actions through the use of culturally-grounded interactional schemes. Free-response data collection techniques and the use of theoretically-generated coding schemes have been used to analyze the respondents' interpretive accounts of the social situation. However, the constructivist school does not preclude the use of a variety of more structured methods of data collection and analysis in order to get at the "interpretive truths" of the cultural participants. Like the ethnomethodological school, the constructivist school of thought is primarily interested in the study of intracultural communication process, rather than intercultural encountering process. Theoretical development and research efforts can be advanced through the systematic testing of the central research concepts in diverse cultural communities; and finally, the differences and similarities of cognitive schemes and interactional schemes of different cultures can be delineated through comparative studies of different cultural groupings.

One final school that is closely aligned to a cognitive orientation to culture is that of cognitive anthropology. Cognitive anthropology is an interpretive approach to the study of culture and is primarily concerned with mapping the cognitive systems of cultural informants through the

analysis of cultural speech patterns. Componential analysis is its prime methodological tool in which "a system of rules underlying a taxonomy is discovered . . . .The resulting schema is a model for understanding how a particular group employs classification procedures for any given area of discourse."[28] The works of Goodenough, Spradley, and Tyler exemplify this interpretive approach to symbolic "discoursing" process.[29]

Finally, when one discusses the different interpretive approaches to language and their qualitative methodological tools, one cannot ignore the ultimate foundation of all interpretive schools: hermeneutic phenomenology. Many excellent texts and articles have been written in this area and hence, the details of this school will not be discussed here.[30] Briefly, a hermeneutic phenomenologist is interested in what members do communicatively and how they go about actually doing it. Language is viewed as the sine qua non of this interpretive school. As according to Hawes: "Interpreting and understanding language as speaking and writing is a hermeneutic of being."[31] Being is thematized in language-use. "Languaging" is viewed as both a resource of social reality and that which constitutes social reality. Communicators create their social world through the constitutive actions of discourse, and the discourse process in turn, binds the two conversants into a reality of their own.

CRITICAL-METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

This section will address some of the critical issues that need to be considered when conducting intercultural qualitative research. Specifically, the following three methodological dimensions will be discussed: (1) cast of characters in the research setting, (2) spatial-temporal setting, and (3) issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research.

The first methodological consideration involves the cast of characters in the research setting. There are basically four groups of characters: the audience (or the observer analysist), the main performing actors and actresses, the supporting cast, and the stage assistants (for example, native informants, translators, etc.). Given such a cast of characters, there are certain choices a researcher has to make: (a) should s/he be a detached observer of the play or a participant-observer? How can s/he arrange a smooth entrance to the play without disrupting the flow of storyline? What role the translator has in the play? (b) what are the most effective and appropriate strategies for observing and participating, listening and recording the unfolding social scripts? (c) should one sample the characters that are involved in the play? or the emerging symbolic events of the play? (d) how does one discern the interrelationships of the cast of characters in the play? how does one distinguish the protagonists from the antagonists? Who holds the truth and who represents the myths?

The second dimension is concerned with the spatial-temporal setting of the evolving drama. Specifically, the observer-analysist will be confronted with the following four questions: (a) How important are the physical and social settings serving as contextual cues to the unfolding social dramas of the play? (b) what are the historical and psychological settings that framed this particular symbolic play? (c) can we delineate clear patterns, phases, or stages as the symbolic act evolves through time? If more than one setting is observed, can one delineate similar symbolic patterns, similar interpretive schemes that attach to these symbolic acts? Finally, (d) as recommended by Lofland, one should be concerned with the following meaning-centered questions when one attempts to link the relationship between the characters of the play with the setting: What life-encompassing

meanings occur among the characters in the setting? What relatively circumbscribed meanings occur among the characters in the setting? What situationally-specific meanings are employed by the characters in the setting? and, what phases of meanings seem to occur among the characters in the setting?[32]

The third methodological concern is with the twin issues of validity and reliability of qualitative inquiry. The bottom-line questions are: By what criteria should we judge a piece of qualitative work? How do we know that the qualitative analysist has captured validly the "multiple truths" of the symbolic act? How do we know that the knowledge structures that have been gained are reliable across-time, and maintained relatively stable characteristics when different observers were sent to observe the same event? Is it appropriate to use conventional modes of validity and reliability standards to evaluate qualitative research?

In the defense of qualitative mode of inquiry in mass communication research, Christians and Carey have proposed four alternative criteria to judge qualitative research: naturalistic observation, contextualization, maximized comparisons, and sensitized concepts.[33] Naturalistic observation is concerned with the degree of reliability in which the naturalistic observation sets up a "poetic resonance with the native interpretation."[34] Contextualization is concerned with the degree of contextual validity in which contextual description of the different research settings in which the symbolic acts have occurred conjured a sense of density, richness, and thickness. Maximized comparisons refers to a "judicious choosing of several comparison groups, not for the purpose of testing the null hypothesis, but to improve the substance and explanatory power of our interpretations."[35] The end-goal is to accumulate enough meaning-specific insights so that a wholistic understanding of the phenomenon under

study may be obtained. Finally, the criterion of sensitized concepts refers to the generation of meaningful and relevant taxonomies through the superimpose processes of theorizing and researching at the same time. As Christians and Carey commented: "Sensitized concepts reflect the perpetual dialectic that is the life of the cultivated mind."[36]

Through thick description of ethnography, introspected reflections, and triangulated research methods such as participant-observation, interview, textual and metaphor analyses, qualitative research is fundamentally, a creative, imaginative research effort in which theory and method are fused into one. With the methodological criteria of systematic and detailed naturalistic observation, density of contextual description, maximized across-groups reliability through comparative analysis, and the development of meaningful sensitized concepts, qualitative approaches may finally gain the respect and recognition that its counterpart, quantitative research has enjoyed for a long time. As Geertz aptly summarizes the goal of an interpretive approach to culture:

> "Culture" itself--is woven into the body of thick-description ethnography in the hope of rendering mere occurrences scientifically eloquent. The aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics.[37]

In intercultural communication research, the emphasis is placed on the concept of "communication." A qualitative mode of inquiry to intercultural communication is to understand the "discoursing" process of social actors that used different interpretive principles and contextual principles to "make sense" of each other's meanings--especially stemming from cultural divergences and differences.

SUGGESTED DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Intercultural qualitative inquiry is still in its infancy. The few qualitative studies that have followed the premises of the interpretive paradigm are mainly nested in the coordinated management of meaning approach or the cultural communication perspective. The evolving characteristics of this handful of studies can be summarized as follows: First, they are primarily intracultural studies rather than intercultural, cross-cultural, interethnic, or interracial studies. Second, these studies have mainly employed textual analysis methods (that is, the analysis of monolog forms such as narrative texts, speeches, retrospective accounts) rather than an interpretive study of face-to-face interaction. Third, although most researchers have been interested in eliciting the conversants' interpretations of the discourse or situation, the concept of "cultural situatedness" (or the conjoint concept of "expectational principle" and "contextual principle") is still a neglected area of investigation. Symbolic discourse is only meaningful in a normative-expectational context and in a socially-situated context. Beyond eliciting the key actors' and actresses' responses of the situation, perhaps attention should also be paid to the supporting casts who constitute the cultural and social contexts.

In addition, several reasons may be proposed to explain the infancy stage of qualitative studies. First, conducting a good, solid piece of qualitative study is a time-consuming and energy-consuming job. In order to collect valid and reliable data in the field, the researcher's participation in a setting for a lengthy period of time under a variety of conditions is vital. Second, intercultural qualitative research is mainly confined in the intracultural communication setting because the ethnographer is usually confronted with linguistic barriers. There is a lack of well-trained bilingual scholars to conduct

cross-cultural comparative studies, or intercultural qualitative studies. Third, the ethnographer is also oftentimes confronted with situational barriers--it is difficult to record and capture symbolic discourse in naturalistic settings without some form of intrusion. Hence, in many instances, it is easier to base qualitative data on triangulated methods such as retrospective interviews, unobtrusive measures, and life histories. This then leads to the last point. Even after the painstaking process of methodological triangulation, data triangulation, or investigator triangulation, one can never be absolutely certain about the issue of validity because the data may appear different but compatible. The conflicting pieces of information may be all valid; they may also be all invalid. Hence, the question of validity is still a central knot that needs to be untied by the intercultural qualitative researchers. Especially in intercultural qualitative inquiry, (since one can never measure and control all the emergent concepts in the naturalistic setting), qualitative cultural differences can be attributed to a host of factors such as language difference, situational difference, personality difference, or competence difference.

Finally, in terms of suggested directions for intercultural qualitative research, there are three: First, one of the most pressing tasks is the study of "contextual principles" in intercultural research. Do intercultural conversants draw on different aspects of situational cues to interpret each other's meanings? Do intercultural participants vary on their reliance of "contextual rules" over "interpretive rules," or "interpretive rules" over "expectational rules" in their intercultural encountering process? How do we triangulate the participant's symbols and definitions of the social situation with the social groups that provide those conceptions ?

Second, it is important to continue the work on interpretive cognitive

processing of discourse (as versus cognitive psychology perspective) in the intercultural setting. For example, what are the implicit taken-for-granted rules operating in this intercultural conversational setting? What kinds of discourse repair mechanisms are needed to re-align the "mis-align talks" in intercultural negotiation setting? How do intercultural conversants "code-switch" from one form of discourse to another in order to adjust to the situation? How do intercultural communicators achieve conversational coherence?

Third, at the same time that it is vital to pursue the qualitative work in intracultural setting, theory development of any interpretive approaches can only be accomplished through the application of theoretical concepts in cross-cultural comparison areas,and in intercultural communication areas. The larger cultural (or normative) issues that concern qualitative studies are: How do symbolic activities reflect, transmit, and create the values, assumptions, and ideologies of a culture? and, how does a cultural community supply a multiplicity of meanings to its different communication forms such as speech acts, rituals, and myths? The final question is: How can we account for the relationship between "contextual principles" and "interpretive principles" in the "sense making" expectational processes of culture?

In conclusion, the potential of qualitative approaches to intercultural research is boundless. Qualitative inquiry calls for hard work, patience, and imagination. It is essentially,a continuous process of unending search and discovery. As Geertz notes: "Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is."[38] It is perhaps this sense of incompleteness, that at once provides the joys and frustrations for qualitative researchers.

In sum, while quantitative research taps the generalizability and predictability of human behavior, qualitative research maps the interpretive and

situational schemata of the social actors. While quantitative research "quantifies" the frequency and statistical significance of human behavior in different research groups, qualitative research "qualifies" the different interpretations of human meanings as embedded in different human conditions.

In intercultural communication research, quantitative research tells us the relationship between different variables in a statistically positive or negative direction among different cultural groupings; qualitative research gives us more specific information on how different intercultural interactants structure and interpret their symbolic worlds with unique sets of cultural premises, values, and rules. Thus, depending on the research question, one's underlying assumption of social reality, and the knowledge structures one wishes to produce, qualitative and quantitative modes of inquiry represent two different research paths, but still in pursuit of a similar end-goal: the explanation and understanding of human behavior in both intracultural and intercultural contexts. In a world full of discussions of cultural pluralism, perhaps we can also accomodate the concept of "methodological pluralism" in the realm of the academic community.

NOTES

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